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Alabama communities recognize businesses that employ people with disabilities

MONTGOMERY – The Alabama Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, a program of the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS), has planned a number of special events around the state as part of the October observance of National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

The events honor businesses that provide opportunities for successful employment for people with disabilities and recognize the success and contributions of individuals with disabilities in the workforce. There are 17 events planned around the state where approximately 150 awards will be awarded. This year's theme is "Expectation + Opportunity = Full Participation."

"This is the time of year when we single out some stellar examples of independence through employment," said Peggy Anderson, ADRS coordinator for business relations. "We honor individuals with disabilities, employers who hire individuals with disabilities, and supporters, such as the news media, legislators, and community partners."

The events also promote the benefits of hiring people with disabilities. Having individuals with disabilities in the workplace is good for the economy, Anderson said.

"For each \$1 that ADRS spends on successfully rehabilitating an individual, \$20.99 is returned to the economy through his or her employment," she said.

ADRS has several services to assist employers that are interested in hiring people with disabilities. Through the Business Relations Program, ADRS staff recruit qualified people with disabilities to meet the employer's needs, provides training for the individual, and provides suggestions for accommodating the individual with a disability.

"We are able to provide employers with individuals who have been perfectly screened," Anderson said. "The quality of referrals is pretty much guaranteed."

With funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, ADRS has temporarily implemented other incentives for hiring individuals with disabilities, including offsetting the cost of training the individual, and covering the cost of an individual temporarily working at a jobsite so the employer can assess the individual before hiring them.

ADRS also provides services to retain employees who acquire disabilities because of illness, aging, or accidents by providing or suggesting accommodations for those individuals.

The mission of ADRS is to enable Alabama's children and adults with disabilities to achieve their maximum potential. In fiscal year 2008, the department assisted 7,554 Alabamians with disabilities in becoming successfully employed.

The Alabama Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities was created in the late 1940's by Gov. Jim Folsom as a response to veterans with disabilities who returned home and found no work available. Since that time, many individuals with disabilities, both veterans and civilians, have received the

benefit of activities of the Governor's Committee. The committee coordinates a network of local volunteer groups throughout the state and works closely with ADRS staff to develop employment opportunities and raise awareness of the needs and rights of Alabamians with disabilities.